



Early Childhood Legislative Update

The State House and Senate narrowly approved a budget for FY16 and FY17 on the last day of the session, June 3. However, the clock ran out of time for legislators to complete the implementer bills, which provide detailed language about the budget. A special session will be called soon to vote on the implementer bills and some other policy issues that did not pass in the final hours of the session.

The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) budget sustained some cuts, but the majority of funding was maintained for early childhood programming. A few programs that were slated for elimination ended up back in the OEC budget with small decreases: Community Plans for Early Childhood, Improving Early Literacy, Help Me Grow, Family-School Connection and Family Empowerment.

A major budget change is the transfer of the Birth to Three System from the Department of Developmental Services to the OEC.

Several early childhood bills passed in the final weeks of the legislative session and await a signature from the Governor. Below are highlights of a few of the major early childhood bills that successfully made their way through the legislative process.

Senate Bill 1101 – An Act Concerning the Office of Early Childhood passed unanimously in the Senate and House. This was the OEC “technical” bill, which made numerous statutory changes. The most important changes are:

- Removes the School Readiness residency requirement which will now allow providers to enroll eligible children from other communities;
- Increases the amount of unexpended School

Readiness funding to be used for teacher scholarships;

- Changes the Care4Kids redetermination window to 12 months, as prescribed by federal law.

House Bill 7020 – An Act Concerning Early Childhood Educator Initiatives also passed, which includes several significant policy changes. They include:

- Delays the requirement for state-funded early care and education programs to meet staff qualifications (50% of lead teachers to hold a bachelor’s degree and 50% to hold an associate’s degree) from July 1, 2015 to July 1, 2017;
- Grandfathers through July 1, 2025 those teachers who hold an associate’s degree and at least 12 credits in early childhood or child development who have been employed in the same state-funded program since 1995 from stricter staff qualification requirements;
- Requires magnet and charter schools to become NAEYC accredited beginning July 1, 2017.

SB 1053 – An Act Prohibiting Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsion for Students in Preschool and Grades Kindergarten to Two will prohibit preschool providers operated under a local or regional board of education, charter or magnet school from expelling a child, unless the child possesses a firearm.

HB 6910 – An Act Concerning Notification of Law Enforcement Agencies to Day Care Centers.

SB 925 – An Act Establishing a Home Visitation Consortium will build on the work that the OEC spearheaded in 2014 that culminated with a [home visiting report](#) submitted to the General Assembly.

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Early Childhood Cabinet/State Advisory Council Focuses on Homeless Families with Young Children

On April 30, Governor Dannel P. Malloy kicked off the Early Childhood Cabinet meeting, unveiling its focus on supporting families with young children who are experiencing homelessness or unstable housing. Lieutenant Governor Nancy Wyman and Office of Early Childhood Commissioner Myra Jones-Taylor co-chair the newly restructured Cabinet. Other state agencies represented at the Cabinet meeting included the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management as well as the Commissioners of the Departments of Children and Families, Developmental Disabilities, Education, Mental Health and Addiction Services and Social Services.

To address homeless families with young children, the Cabinet will work to develop a two-generational strategy that will address both the children and the adults in the family. The goal of the Cabinet is to develop a policy and legislative plan to improve outcomes for these families for the Governor by November 2015. The plan will align policies across agencies, increase collaboration and share efforts around outreach, training, data and other areas.

At the meeting, the Cabinet and attendees heard a presentation about the CT Head Start-Family Shelter



Partnership, which included an example from CRT, Inc. aimed at expediting enrollment of children living in the East Hartford Family Shelter into Head Start classrooms, creating a child-friendly and more home-like environment to decrease mother and child stress, increasing availability of developmentally appropriate toys and books, and expediting comprehensive services to families through connecting the shelter staff with the DCF Family Partnership and other early childhood networking opportunities in the community and connecting early childhood staff to housing's Coordinated Access Network.

In addition, the Cabinet's Families Without Homes Subcommittee met on May 28. For more information about the Early Childhood Cabinet, please go to <http://www.ctearlychildhood.org/>.

Commissioner's Corner: *Confronting Racism*

On June 17, I gave the graduation speech to the fourth-grade graduating class at an elementary school in New Haven. Swells of joy and hope surged through my body as I looked out into the beaming eyes and broad smiles of the two rows of black and brown children festooned in shiny blue caps and gown. Each of their hands shot into the air when I asked them, "Who here is going to college?" My waves of joy collected into tears at the sight of all of the little black and brown hands reaching for the sky.

The next morning I awoke to the horrible news of what had occurred at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. I have walked past this church countless times in my annual visits with family there and know the community well, a community now struggling to make sense of the horrors that occurred there on June 17. Trembling from waves of my grief, I thought of the precious faces I had looked out onto the night before. I thought, *What would I say to them today? What do you say to children who, for no*

other reason than the color of their skin, live in a country where they must live in fear of being terrorized in their own church, a space that should be safe and sacred for them?

Like so many in this country, I find myself reflecting on the part I play in ensuring acts of racial, religious and other violence like this do not continue. I was reminded of a recent observation an educator made to me after seeing the Office of Early Childhood's guiding principles. She was struck by our ninth principle: *Confront institutional racism and disparities*. She said to me, "I've never seen a state agency call out their role in ending racism as explicitly as that. Thank you."

Today, in the wake of yet another act of brutality against people in this country, I ask you to reflect on what you are doing in your work with children and families to confront institutional racism and disparities? What are you doing in the communities you serve? We owe it to our children to address these issues head on. We owe it to our children to play our part in helping make this country and world a safe place for all of them, no matter the color of their skin.

OEC Welcomes New Staff

The Office of Early Childhood welcomed new staff in 2015, including 15 Child Care Licensing Specialists to implement annual inspections of licensed child care facilities, Child Care Licensing Supervisors to provide supervisory support to the child care licensing program, staff to support the background check program for child care licensing, an attorney to head the agency's legal office, an accountant, staff to oversee and implement the federal Preschool Development Grant and a Grants and Contracts Specialist. The new positions will help the OEC operate more efficiently and better serve young children and their families.

Early Childhood Information System Launch

The Office of Early Childhood (OEC), in partnership with the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), has redesigned the process for issuing State Assigned Student Identification (SASID) numbers to children in early care and education programs.

Beginning this summer, SASID numbers will be assigned to children using the new Early Childhood Information System (ECIS). Users in community-based early care and education programs will be able to assign SASID numbers for children from the same pool of ID numbers used by the public school programs. This new SASID assignment process is the first step toward the development of an integrated Early Childhood Information System. Along with the new SASID assignment process, the OEC is rolling out a new Early Care and Education program data system. It will be the first time the state will have basic, unduplicated information on children in publicly funded pre-K programs in a real-time system, rather than an annual data collection.

Overall, the Early Childhood Integrated Data System will support a coordinated system of early childhood services in Connecticut, providing a mechanism for streamlined reporting and data analysis as well as improved efficiencies and accountability for a coordinated and comprehensive system.

Information regarding the new ECIS was sent to state-funded early care and education programs in early February. For more information about the ECIS, please go to www.ct.gov/oec/ecis.

OEC Celebrates Its First Birthday

On May 28, the OEC celebrated the one-year anniversary of Governor Dannel P. Malloy signing the bill codifying the agency in statute. The Office of Early Childhood, the agency responsible for coordinating and improving the various early childhood programs and components in the state to create a cohesive high-quality early childhood system, was created through Executive Order No. 35 by Governor Malloy in June of 2013. Public Act 14-41 formally established the agency in statute.



Smart Start Communities Receive Bond Funds for Capital Improvements

At a State Bond Commission meeting on May 11, \$1.6 million of bond funds were approved for 12 communities receiving Smart Start funds for high-quality preschool classrooms. The bond funds will be used for capital improvements to make preschool classrooms in public school building appropriate for preschool children. The first Smart Start classrooms are set to open this fall in 14 communities throughout the state, providing an additional 416 three- and four-year-olds with high-quality preschool.



Strategic Planning Process Underway

The OEC is committed to its vision that each child is surrounded by a strong network of nurturing adults who deeply value the importance of the first years of a child's life and who have the skills, knowledge, support and passion to meet the unique needs of every child. To help achieve our vision, the OEC will be creating a 4-year strategic plan to guide our work over the coming years.

Stakeholders, providers, families and the public will have opportunities to weigh in on the plan this summer. The OEC will hold public forums across the state to seek input from the public on its strategic plan

framework. In addition, a draft of the plan will be made available online to give the public an opportunity to provide feedback through an online survey and through comment at the special meeting following the Early Childhood Cabinet Meeting.

After incorporating public feedback, the OEC will release its final 4-year strategic plan and an annual operational plan, entailing how the agency will work toward its 4-year goals each year. For more information about the strategic plan and the planning process, please contact Mary Farnsworth at mary.farnsworth@ct.gov.

OEC Takes a Look at Capacity and Need for Early Care and Education Statewide

This spring, the Office of Early Childhood launched a statewide unmet needs study to assess the capacity of the early care and education field and the unmet needs of families across the state. The findings from the unmet needs study will help drive policy changes and direct resources to families who need them most.

The study will look at families with young children from birth to age five, will incorporate various choices a family has for child care and will look at the unmet need of specific vulnerable populations. It will also pay extra attention to the decisions, needs and perspectives of parents as an essential component of the report. The report will not only look at the numbers of child care spaces, but also at affordability, location,

hours and other key attributes of the child care programs.

The Office of Early Childhood has partnered with the CT Economic Resource Center to help manage the project and is assembling a team of multidisciplinary researchers to conduct the analysis. A team of advisors from around the country has been assembled to advise on the scope, questions, data and methods of the study. Additionally, a team of local data experts responsible for many previous unmet needs reports has been invited to participate in crafting the report. For more information about this project, please contact Mary Farnsworth at mary.farnsworth@ct.gov.

Congresswoman DeLauro Attends Roundtable Discussion on Infant Mental Health

Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro and Connecticut experts in child health and development held a discussion on infant mental health at New Haven's LULAC Head Start center on May 6. DeLauro is co-chair of the Congressional Baby Caucus, which recently held a briefing on the State of America's Babies. That briefing featured testimony from the President of the American Academy of Pediatrics who discussed infant mental health.

DeLauro is the senior Democrat on the subcommittee responsible for funding the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services Department, which administers the Early Head Start and Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) programs. Both programs give parents the skills they need to support their kids' cognitive, social and emotional development



in the short-term, and reduce inequality and narrow achievement gaps in the long-term.

After the lively discussion, the Congresswoman toured a classroom at the center, visiting with the toddlers, staff and parents.

OEC Commissioner Named to National Leadership Fellowship

The Aspen Institute announced in March that Connecticut Office of Early Childhood Commissioner, Dr. Myra Jones-Taylor, has been selected to join the 2015 class of Aspen Institute Ascend Fellows. The Ascend Fellowship invests in diverse leaders from a range of sectors who have breakthrough ideas to build economic security, educational success, and health and well-being for low-income families in the US. Commissioner Jones-Taylor is one of 21 men and women selected from across the nation. Each of these leaders will fuel their work with a two-generation approach that invests in children and their parents together. The fellows will meet together four times between May 2015 and May 2016. The fellowship will culminate in an action plan that will advance a two-generation solution for Connecticut's most vulnerable families.

The 2015 Ascend Fellows join the vanguard of a national network to advance opportunity for low-income families across the country. This year's class includes state human services and early education system leaders, forward thinking post-secondary and workforce leaders, breakthrough researchers in health and early care and education, philanthropic leaders, and innovative practitioners across multiple sectors.

The Ascend Fellowship is a values-based leadership program that builds on the best of the Aspen Institute leadership tradition. Ascend Fellows learn from outstanding faculty; participate in signature Institute convenings and platforms; tap powerful networks of social justice and other leaders; and carry out action plans that advance their innovations and solutions on behalf of children and families.

For bios and photos of all 21 extraordinary leaders, visit <http://ascend.aspeninstitute.org>.



Division of Licensing Receives Environmental Award

In April, the New England Office of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) awarded staff from OEC's Division of Licensing and the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) an Environmental Merit Award for their work on the state's Child Day Care Screening Assessment for Environmental Risk (SAFER) program.

The SAFER program, jointly administered by the Division of Licensing and DPH, helps protect children from chemical exposures by identifying child care centers located on sites or in buildings contaminated with chemicals and hazardous materials. The program also works to prevent the opening of new child care centers on contaminated sites or buildings.

Staff from the Division of Licensing, as well as staff with the DPH Environmental & Occupational Health Unit, received the 2015 Environmental Merit Awards, which are awarded annually by EPA in recognition of exceptional work and commitment to the environment.

The SAFER Program identifies child care centers with potential environmental concerns by reviewing locations of child care centers and comparing the locations with the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's (DEEP) hazardous waste site list, through a questionnaire that gathers information about past uses of a child care center property or building, or inspecting sites of new child care centers for signs of past industrial use (e.g. drums, machinery, loading docks) and for current nearby businesses that may cause environmental exposures (e.g. dry cleaners, nail salons).

Locations identified as having a potential problem are referred to SAFER where the program works with DEEP, EPA and local health departments to quickly abate any environmental contamination hazards.

To date, 37 child care centers have been referred to SAFER for evaluation, resulting in 14 site visits. Significant environmental concerns identified through the SAFER Program include a child care center with elevated levels of arsenic in its playground soil and a child care center located in a former funeral home where formaldehyde was used.

For more information about Connecticut's SAFER Program, visit: www.ct.gov/dph/safer.

OEC to Launch Quality Improvement Support System in 2016

The Office of Early Childhood is pleased to announce we will be launching an integrated quality improvement system to support early care and education programs and professionals in 2016. Beginning in FY16, this system will allocate funds to support early care and education providers so they may provide safe, supportive environments for children and families while incorporating best practices in teaching and learning. Here are some highlights of the quality improvement system:

For all types of early care and education settings and roles. The initial quality improvement system will provide effective support to all types of early care and education settings in our state including centers, home-based providers (family child care and family, friend, and neighbor care), school-based settings and Head Start programs. It will provide support to teachers, assistants, administrators, consultants and other staff.

Best practices in quality improvement support. The support provided will include a combination of the most effective professional development and program improvement supports including trainings, coaching, technical assistance and communities of learning. It will include online tools and resources available universally and in-person support available to eligible programs statewide.

Build on strengths of existing organizations. Connecticut organizations, consultants and providers have a wealth of knowledge on how to help early care and education programs and staff serve families and children better. The system will provide funds and structure to increase the number of programs and professionals receiving professional development support and technical assistance. It will also build a comprehensive system that weaves together existing support. Existing contracts for quality improvement support will not be modified in FY16.

Ongoing input and partnership from providers. The OEC will establish an ongoing Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) committee with representation from early care and education programs and partners across the state. The CQI will help to help refine and improve the policies of the system and the quality of support delivered.

Long term vision. States around the country have launched Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) that both provide quality support and include quality ratings of programs. This quality improvement system is the foundation of support for our future QRIS, but a rating system will not be implemented until a future phase in the coming years. In the long term, this system will also expand to provide integrated support to *all* early childhood service providers including home visiting programs.

What happens next? The OEC will be contracting with a partner, the United Way of Connecticut, to manage operations of the statewide system. The OEC will work to finalize details of the contract and scope. While system development is underway, the OEC will communicate via this newsletter, at public meetings such as in the hour after the Early Childhood Cabinet reserved for OEC matters, the early childhood listserv, the OEC website and targeted campaigns to providers. For more information please email mary.farnsworth@ct.gov.

Connecticut Kindergarten Symposium

On May 12th, the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood and the State Department of Education hosted a Kindergarten Symposium for approximately 250 Connecticut educators. This event featured Dr. Elena Bodrova as the keynote speaker, discussing the importance of executive functioning for young children and the key role of dramatic play in promoting the development of these skills.

The symposium also included information about Connecticut's work on a revised Kindergarten Entrance Inventory, based on the CT Early Learning and Development Standards. Work on this tool is being completed in conjunction with a consortium of states, led by Maryland as a recipient of a federal Enhanced Assessment Grant, and in partnership with WestEd and Johns Hopkins University. In addition, a panel of Connecticut educators shared how they use data regarding kindergarten students to improve practice in classrooms and communities and to communicate with families. Finally, a group of approximately 30 kindergarten teachers participated in afternoon workgroup sessions, examining items from the inventory and providing input on the utility of the tool for informing instruction.

Throughout the day, the importance of considering the whole child, observing children in a natural setting and embedding assessment as a part of the classroom routine were discussed. The OEC and CSDE look forward to future opportunities to share information and engage Connecticut stakeholders in the process of developing a new Kindergarten Entrance Inventory.

Division of Licensing Conducts Mock Inspections

Earlier this year, in an ongoing effort to promote high quality programs and ensure the healthy physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of children, the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) Division of Licensing partnered with the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) Early Childhood Advisory Committee to investigate the feasibility of licensing pre-K programs administered by public schools. Under State of Connecticut Statutes and Regulations for Licensing Child Day Care Centers and Group Day Care Centers, programs that are administered by a public school system are currently exempt from meeting state licensing requirements.

In order for public school Superintendents, Principals and staff to be better informed regarding the practicality of licensing their pre-K programs, school districts throughout the state were called upon to volunteer for mock inspections to be conducted in their pre-K programs. The objective of the mock inspections was to determine any obstacles these programs might face if licensing became required, as well as the extent to which licensing requirements are appropriate when applied to pre-K programs that operate in public schools.

A total of seven school districts volunteered to participate in the process, which resulted in mock inspections being conducted in a total of 25 classrooms. During the mock inspections, licensing staff measured classrooms to determine potential capacity; conducted a head-count of children and staff present; walked through of the indoor and outdoor program space; and examined physical plant conditions. Additionally, through discussions with the school administrators, information was obtained regarding staff qualifications, general operating policies and local approvals. Upon

completion of the inspection, a written copy of the inspection report was shared and discussed with school administrators and information about the licensing process was shared.

Upon analyzing the data collected from the each of the inspections, it was discovered that these programs are well on their way to meeting licensing requirements. It was found that these programs not only meet but in many cases exceed what would be required to become licensed in many areas. Some of these areas include: the ratio of staff to children; staff qualifications; square footage of useable space in the classrooms; and the condition of the physical plant. Overall, there were a few minor corrections needed to meet requirements that could be easily categorized as “quick fixes” and only, two issues identified as potential barriers to licensing these programs. The first is the comprehensive lead inspection which must be conducted as part of the initial application process for any structure built prior to 1978. The concern here lies not only in the cost of the test, but with the additional potential expense for remediation and/or abatement of areas with elevated levels of lead. Secondly, concern was expressed by school administrators regarding the responsibility to maintain oversight of the licensing requirements that would be required of them in addition to their already demanding schedules.

Whether public school pre-K programs will be required to be licensed or monitored by the Office of Early Childhood Division of Licensing in the future is yet to be seen, however, the groundwork for this collaboration has been established and we are off to a great start.



Connecticut Office of
Early Childhood

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